



Proposed freeway could harm students' health

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Mountain ridges are one thing, the health of children quite another.

Some opponents of the proposed South Mountain Freeway have long complained that the route would cut through three ridges in South Mountain and disrupt the area's ecology.

But others say they are more worried about the long-term health impacts on students at more than half a dozen schools that sit within a half mile of the proposed route along Pecos Road.

"That is a big concern to me because I don't think it's healthy for our kids," said Rae Waters, a member of the Kyrene School District governing board. "I just think it's a safety issue for our kids."

More than 3,600 students attend five Kyrene elementary and middle schools just north of the proposed freeway route. Another 1,485 students attend Horizon Community Learning Center, and almost 2,900 students attend Desert Vista High School. Kyrene de los Lagos' lot line comes within several hundred feet of where the freeway would run.

Neither the Kyrene school board nor the district's administration has taken a position for or against the freeway.

But the district is looking at legal action to force the Arizona Department of Transportation to build a wall or implement other "mitigation measures" to protect school children, said district spokeswoman Kelly Walton.

ADOT is preparing a draft environmental-impact statement that will cover air quality and other impacts expected from the 22-mile, 10-lane freeway.

ADOT spokesman Doug Nintzel did point out that land-use planning decisions made by the school districts and Phoenix are responsible for the close proximity of the schools to the freeway. All seven schools were planned and built years after voters approved a half-cent sales tax for freeways in 1985 and the State Transportation Board chose the Pecos Road alignment in 1988.

"In a perfect world, there wouldn't be any schools or homes near freeways, but ADOT doesn't make those land-use decisions," Nintzel said.

Earlier this year, the medical journal *The Lancet* published the results of a 13-year study showing that the closer children live to busy highways, the greater risk they face in developing respiratory problems for the rest of their lives.

That risk extends to schools, said Jim Gauderman, the study's lead author and an epidemiologist at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine.

"There's certainly a lot of emerging work that traffic exposure has health effects on children," Gauderman said.

The study followed 3,600 children ages 10-18 in 12 Southern California communities and found that children living near freeways suffered about the same damage as those living in communities with the highest levels of pollution.

The culprit appears to be the ultra-fine particles from automobile exhausts that get into the small airways of the lung, the study found. Researchers found that children who lived within 500 yards of a freeway had a 7 percent deficiency in the rate of air they could exhale.

But Gauderman said research also indicates there appears to be long-term effects to children's cardiovascular and neurological health, although more studies are needed.

The researchers recently received a grant from the National Institutes of Health, which funded the initial study, to determine which specific pollutants have the biggest effect on children's health.

Offsetting those effects at schools is difficult, Gauderman said, unless administrators install special air filters, plant trees nearby and keep school children indoors away from the particulates. The last tactic, however, is virtually impossible if kids want to enjoy outdoor recess and sports.

"That's the kind of thing we worry about more often," Gauderman said. "Whatever is in that ambient air is a risk for children who are playing and exercising. We do worry about sports fields right by major roads for sure."

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I guess the district should have thought about this before building the schools in the path or near a freeway. Stupid them. Perhaps the parents should sue the schools now and lay off of ADOT and let them build the darn freeway once and for all.

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@bacabob:
No stupid you.

The schools were not built in the path of the freeway. ADOT changed the path and the size of the freeway footprint years after the schools were built which allowed the Kyrene de los Lagos School to almost be in the path of the freeway. There are 32 houses that sit farther back from the proposed freeway (but sit adjacent to the school) that taxpayers will buy so ADOT can tear them down. But ADOT will not buy the school because of costs and legalities.

I hope the people in the west, north and east valley enjoy sitting in parking lots because ADOT spent the \$110 million budgeted for their road improvements on buying homes, businesses and churches for the South Mountain Freeway or paying for Ahwatukee's water.

Here's something ADOT never discusses:

In 2003 a \$60 million water line to Ahwatukee Foothills was bored thru South Mountain and runs under Pecos Road. That supplies water to a community of 90,000 people. It would have to be relocated if a freeway is built on Pecos Road. A safe conservative estimate to redo that project in 2009 – \$100 million. That doesn't include the cost of relocating the community's utilities, which also run under Pecos Road. Has ADOT informed the public about the 50 year old fuel lines that run adjacent to Pecos Road and carry all fuel (gas, jet, natural gas) from El Paso to the valley and how they are going to deal with that issue-monetarily? These lines will break and will have to be upgraded and moved during construction. That is a fact

Your public officials are flushing your tax dollars down the toilet if this freeway is allowed to be built in its current path. In excess of \$250 million will be spent in just the Ahwatukee are buying right of way and moving utilities.

Just another incredible waste of your tax dollars by putting the money where it doesn't help the most.

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Planning perfectly for the future commonwealth is just impossible, is great that our culture in public funds administration is such that we have this entire infrastructure. Who ever did the previous projects were just people trying to do their best with that they knew or had in front of them, what ADOT is doing presently is the best they can do with what they know and have.

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just quit bitchin and build the DING DANG FREEWAY!!!! we're all goona die anyway - what difference does it make... At least if they put the frwy in it won't take as long to get to the hospitals...

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The costs outweigh the benefits - big time. The losers are the school kids who have to go to school in concentrated air pollution for potentially their entire childhood and adolescent development. The hundreds of families who will be evicted from their homes and communities. The taxpayers for a ridiculous waste - with a tremendous billion + opportunity cost at a time when many important transportation projects and repairs will be left sitting for the future. All of us will lose a portion of a pride of the Valley - South Mountain Park, and set a troubling precedent for the future by cutting canyons through our Mountain Preserves for freeway expansion. We will all suffer due to more heavily government subsidized car-dependence, which raises gas prices, increases an already huge risk to our economy, and worsens our ozone and particulate-laden air.

The winner is the Homebuilding Association of Arizona - Who will be able to convert the farmland of Laveen into McHouses and a mindnumbing sea of monotonous cookie-cutter crapola subdivisions.

That's it. Hope you feel good about how that subtraction to your paycheck every month is being spentnation's dumbest state.

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